

# *Sketch*

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## Iron Man

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## **Abstract**

"COME on, come on! Speed it up, Dope! How'm I ever gonna make a musician outa you?"  
My brother's voice came crackling down the stairs and, as usual, ruffled my temper the wrong way...

# Iron Man

George Thomson

“COME on, come on! Speed it up, Dope! How’m I ever gonna make a musician outa you?” My brother’s voice came crackling down the stairs and, as usual, ruffled my temper the wrong way.

“If being a musician means being like you, I’m not so sure I want’a be one,” I muttered. Then to myself I added grimly, “This is gonna be one sweet session.”

The telephone jangled irritably and I jumped to answer it.

“Hello!”

“Hello,—Hello, is this Tom?”

“No, this is Gee. Shall I call him?” The voice fumbled uncertainly as I put down the receiver and called up the stairs, “Phone for you, Wingy. Whiteman wants to sign you up.”

For no good reason I started up the stairs just as Tom started down. I had some vague hope that I might trip him, but I took a cuff in the ear for my pains and was pushed back downstairs. I finished the climb swearing to myself.

From the floor below Tom’s voice drifted upward; at first sharp and brittle, then drifting off into silence. “Maybe it IS Whiteman,” I thought hopefully. The receiver clicked dully and for a moment there was quiet; then footsteps came slowly up the stairs until Tom’s prematurely grey hair appeared at floor level—gradually followed by the six foot and 180 pounds of bone, flesh and sarcasm that made my brother such a menace.

“Who was it, Champ?”

“Hunh? Oh—nobody, nobody.” His voice was flat and colorless but he looked no different than usual. Somehow the suggestion of trouble clung to me.

“Aw, come on! Get it off your chest. Did your girl drop you? Did Williams give you the sack? Did somebody hock your hor—?”

“Go to hell, will you?” He turned on me savagely and for the first time in years I was really afraid of him. Then his hands dropped and his shoulders slumped. The pain and fight went out of his eyes and we both tried to act as if nothing had happened.

"Listen, Gee." His voice was almost soft but it was still miles off and it didn't sound like it wanted me for company. "You remember Spud Jackson?"

This was familiar ground and I regained some of my ebbing confidence. "Sure. He's the best swing and legit bass fiddler in the business and probably the only guy that'll put up with your guff for two weeks in a row."

"Yeah, that's the guy. He killed himself tonight." Cold and precise the words rattled together like death's-heads in the quiet of the room.

"What!" My voice cracked with the shock and surprise. "Not Spud! He wouldn't! You're kiddin'!"

"Oh sure." His voice was a sword edge dulled on the grit of pain. "I'm always kiddin' about things like that. Come on, pick up your horn. If you're gonna play in my outfit, you've gotta be good."

"But Tom, not tonight! Not after Spud—"

"Whose friend was he—yours or mine? Now pick up that horn!"

We stuck to it for ninety long minutes. Once he said, "Keep it up, you're almost as good a trumpeter as Goodman already." And there I slipped. "But Goodman plays clarinet!" I protested.

"Oh, does he now?" Heavy with sarcasm the answer came back and I marked up one more mental cross that I swore I'd avenge.

At last it was over. I put my horn away sulkily and clumped downstairs for a glass of milk. Tom just stood with the gleaming trumpet resting lightly on his fingers—I always held mine like it might blow up—his eyes followed me down. Before I reached the bottom he lifted the horn to his lips and began to play softly.

I was just finishing my milk and pie when I noticed that the room was no longer pulsing to the gentle silvery rhythm. The sound had become louder, note by note, until now a strange melody—twisting and screaming—battered my mind and carried it off into a cacophony of emotion.

My first sense of pride in having a brother who could make music like that changed almost at once to disgust and shame. "How can he play jazz when his best friend just killed himself? How can he think of music—music like that—at a time like this? What sort of a brute is he? Doesn't he hold anything in respect?"

I was mad and shocked and with no clear plan in mind I raced for the stairs.

Abruptly the mad, flashing horn stopped. There was complete and deafening silence. A second later something fragile and metallic shattered into the wall and fell to the floor with a dull and broken clanging. I crept quietly up the stairs and stopped—my fingers biting into the plaster until green paint gritted under my nails. One look was enough.

Almost even with my eyes the golden trumpet lay grotesquely twisted—the bell split in half and folded back into a senseless jumble of tubes and valves. Tom was sprawled at the desk, his face buried in his arms, wide shoulders retching in the misery of his sobs. On the floor, at his feet, lay a snap-shot of a homely, smiling young man—leaning on a bass fiddle.

I turned and stumbled downstairs—a stranger.

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## Chicago

Lois Larson

I LOVE Chicago. I love the people that fight and claw their way through the streets, the checkered and yellow cabs on a rainy day with their tops looking like shiny patent leather shoes on parade, the sharp whistle of the cop on the corner and the crazy pattern of traffic that darts unexpectedly from nowhere accompanied by the agonizing blare of horns and the indignant shouts of pedestrians. I love the lunch-starved Kitty Foyles in their frayed white collars gulping down milk shakes at O'Connell's, the big department stores with beautiful chromium elevators and trim elevator girls. I love the smell of Chicago—L'amour at five dollars an ounce, onions and raw hamburger, the fresh, clean smell of little children, and the tantalizing odor of salted peanuts. I love the steady throb of the "el" overhead, the smart click of French heels, and the confident stride of the executive. Chicago is the pop of a bottle of champagne, the tired shuffle of the cleaning woman as she drags her mop down the already clean floor. It's women in formals and men in tails. It's shrieking horns and blazing lights, hot bands and worn out hand organs—laughter, heartbreak, music, and tears. Chicago is people.